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MEDIA RELEASE

CHARTER GUARANTEES 60,000 VOLUNTEERS THEIR VOICE

The body that represents Victoria's 60,000 CFA volunteers has presented the Premier and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services with framed copies of the Volunteer Charter they signed last year at the ceremony marking the launch of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

The CFA Volunteer Charter was first concluded by the State Government with the CFA and the then two separate rural and urban volunteer associations in December 2001. It was the first of its type in the world.

Premier John Brumby and Minister Bob Cameron reaffirmed the CFA Volunteer Charter last year in an official ceremony marking the official launch of the united Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

The handing over of the framed copies to the Premier and the Minister has been delayed by the tragic 2008/09 fire season and its aftermath.

"This presentation is now timely with the CFA and the State reviewing and determining ways of improving bushfire and emergency response arrangements," VFBV President Gary Lyttle said.

"The Premier and the Minister have demonstrated time and again their support for CFA volunteers and through the Volunteer Charter their commitment to full consultation with us before making decisions that affect Volunteers," Mr Lyttle said.

"The Volunteer Charter is an important guarantee to CFA volunteers that they have a critical role in the process of making decisions on the future of CFA and bushfire fighting arrangements," he said.

"Our 60,000 members - over 97% of the CFA workforce - represent a vast reserve of fire fighting knowledge and experience.

"They are the people who know the most about Victoria's unique fire environment and are among those who have the most at stake when changes to fire fighting are made.

“The consultation guaranteed by the Volunteer Charter is important to ensuring that this knowledge and experience is factored into decisions taken by the CFA and Government.

“There may be experts, pressure groups and others who want to affect any final decision, but our volunteers are the people who will have to make it work.”

VFBV has also concluded a binding Deed of Agreement with the CFA covering practical ways of implementing the Volunteer Charter and managing the consultative processes it requires.

The Volunteer Charter also deals with volunteer welfare and affirms the commitment of the State Government and CFA to properly training and equipping the volunteers.

“The Charter and its supporting Deed ensures that Volunteers can play an active role in planning for the future of the CFA as a volunteer and community-based fire and emergency service,” Mr Lyttle said.

“With climate change adding to the threat of fire, and demographic changes affecting service demand and capacity, one of the biggest challenges CFA and its volunteers face is maintaining and building an even more effective volunteer and community based CFA,” he said.

VFBV’s presentation of a framed copy of the Volunteer Charter to Premier John Brumby today is more than symbolic. It marks a day in which VFBV officials have held meetings with government and opposition MPs, briefing them on the volunteers’ needs and what they can offer.

“In a time in which many Victorians are gravely concerned about fire and the state’s preparations for it, the advice and practical experience offered by our 60,000 members is invaluable,” Mr Lyttle said.

“Today is a day to reaffirm that Victorians who are concerned about fire can still rely on the well trained, long experienced and thoroughly dedicated volunteers of the CFA.”

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